State Environmental Policy Act

The State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) provides a way to identify possible environmental impacts that may result from a proposal.

What is the SEPA review process?

SEPA environmental review usually starts when:

- An application to construct a private project, such as an office building, a grocery store, or an apartment building is submitted to the City;
- The City or other agency is considering construction of a public project, such as a new school, a road, or other project;
- The City is developing a regulation, policy, or plan, such as a City comprehensive plan, a critical area ordinance, or a water quality regulation.

Some minor projects do not require SEPA review. If the proposed project is the type of project that is "categorically exempt" from SEPA, no further SEPA review is needed.

Categorical Exemptions

The following types of construction are exempt, except when undertaken wholly or partly on lands covered by water, the proposal would alter the existing conditions within a critical area or buffer, or a rezone or any license governing emissions to the air or discharges to water is required:

A. The construction or location of:
   1. *Any residential structures up to thirty dwelling units.*
   2. *A multifamily structure with up to sixty dwelling units.*
B. *The construction of an office, school, commercial, recreational, service or storage building with 30,000 square feet of gross floor area and with associated parking facilities designed for 90 automobiles.*
C. *The construction of a parking lot designed for 90 automobiles. This exemption includes stand-alone parking lots.*
D. *Any landfill or excavation of 1,000 cubic yards throughout the total lifetime of the fill*

Note: for a complete list of categorical exemptions, see WAC 197-11-800.

Checklist and Threshold Determination

If the proposed project is not exempt, the applicant will follow the SEPA process, which includes a pre-application meeting with City staff, holding a neighborhood meeting, and filling out an "environmental checklist". This checklist asks questions about the proposal and its potential impacts on the environment. The elements of the environment that will be evaluated include earth, air, water, plants, animals, energy, environmental health, land use, transportation, public services, and utilities. There is also a public comment period and an appeal period. The City as lead agency reviews the checklist and other information about the proposal. If the lead agency needs additional information to

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evaluate the proposal, they may ask the applicant to conduct studies, such as a traffic study, or a study to determine if there are wetlands on the project site, etc. The agency will use this information to make a "threshold determination."

Determination of Non-significance (DNS & MDNS)
If the lead agency has enough information to determine that the proposal is unlikely to have a "probable significant adverse environmental impact", the agency will issue a determination of non-significance (DNS).When the lead agency has a reasonable basis to issue a DNS or a single notification and comment period for the application and threshold determination may be used to allow concurrent review of the proposal and its impacts. This process is called the "optional DNS" under WAC 197-11-355. Often a project that may have impacts can be mitigated through SEPA. These kinds of modifications are SEPA "mitigation measures." The lead agency may issue a mitigated determination of non-significance (MDNS) if conditions are imposed or incorporated into the project so that significant impacts would be avoided or minimized.

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)
If information indicates the proposal is likely to have a significant adverse environmental impact, the lead agency will issue a Determination of Significance (DS), and require the preparation of an environmental impact statement (EIS). The EIS will include an impartial discussion of significant environmental impacts, an evaluation of reasonable alternatives to the proposal, and measures that would avoid or reduce the adverse environmental impacts of the proposal. The purpose of the EIS process is to resolve potential problems, disclose potential impacts and make better decisions regarding the proposal.

Additional Information
This handout provides a very basic overview of SEPA. For specific information about the purpose and procedural requirements of SEPA, refer to SEPA, chapter 43.21C RCW; SEPA Rules, chapter 197-11 WAC; and SEPA Guide for Project Applicants or the SEPA Guide for Citizens provided by the Department of Ecology). These documents and additional information about SEPA are available on the Internet.

http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/sea/sepa/e-review.html

This handout was developed in part using information from the Department of Ecology website.